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Leonard - Bach's influence on eighteenth century music - 1919.

BACH'S INFLUENCE ON EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MUSIC

BY

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

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BACH'S CONTRIBUTION TO 18th. CENTURY MUSIC

INTRODUCTION

During the latter part of the 17th. century, commonly known as the period of decadence, there were, living in Germany certain gifted and cultured men who were ignoring the deteriorated manner of working in music previous to their age. The aim of these men, was to work for a purer, more polyphonic style; quite different from the previous musical forms. Naturally these men were unrecognized by the majority of their fellow men, and when they were recognized none received the recognition due him.

It was probably the widespread political disorders of the time, such as the dynastic changes in England between 1688 and 1714; the war of the Spanish Succession; the influence of Charles XII of Sweden; the rise of Russia under Peter the Great; the war of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War (1756-63) which had checked musical enterprise.

The musicians criticism had not yet been directed toward the creation of aesthetic art works, but had been very restricted. The arts of architecture, sculpture, painting and poetry suffered terribly during the Thirty Years War, but on the contrary music advanced, for during that period, the German tone masters were working to develop a pure music; music that would speak from the heart.



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The rapidity of the change in music seems remarkable, and perhaps no other half century has seen such radical change in ideals and methods, as this first half of the eighteenth century.

Germany possessed in the eighteenth century in tone, mediators between the classic and Christian art cultures, as did Italy two centuries before, with her great architects and sculptors, also England and Spain with their greatest poets of the world.

In studying the rise of the German supremacy in music which began with Bach, we are justified in assigning a particular importance to the National inheritance of three great forms, which I will develop further on pages and . They include first, the chorale, secondly the church cantata, which was the direct outcome of the chorale, and third, the Passion music, the source of which is quite different from the chorale and cantata. But first let us see the influence which Bach himself had on the Protestant music, and understand why he is so renowned.

B A C H

Johann Sebastian Bach is one of the monumental figures in the religious history of Germany, and undoubtedly the most considerable in the two centuries following the death of Luther. Like Luther, of whom in some respects he reminds us, he was a man of German soil, sprung from peasant stock, endowed with the sterling piety and steadfastness of moral purpose, which had long been traditional in the Teutonic character.

Bach must be regarded as the founder of modern tonal art and he is the central point of collective musical history. In Germany, the advance of the church music, both for the voice and for the organ, came to a mighty culmination in Bach, the first of the triumvirate of geniuses, now universally recognized. He brought to a close the thousand years of working which preceded him, and he opens a new vista of a glorified art. As Palestrina was the incarnation of sacred Catholic music, so Bach is the representative of the Protestant music.

Bach's culture was, at its basis, purely German, and he never went abroad to seek the elegancies which his nation lacked, as did some other musicians. He did not despise these foreign friends, but he let them come to him, to be absorbed in the substance of his national education, in order that this education might become liberal and human. He interpreted not what was ephemeral and exotic, but what was permanent and hereditary in German culture. Bach imbued

his religious music with more human and intimate sentiments, than the severe orthodoxy before him had done. There dominates in Bach a human element which rises to heaven.

Bach introduced into instrumental music the forms of polyphonic vocal music. He modified the sonata⁹, suite and fugue, so there is little or no resemblance between his compositions and those of his predecessors. Altho the opera was the dominant form in every other country in Europe, Bach ignored it and worked chiefly upon the German church music. He created no new styles; he gave art no new direction. He was performing the duties which were traditionally attached to his office, improvising fugues and preludes, accompanying choirs and congregations on Sundays, and was one of the many poorly paid, overworked church musicians. Outside of Leipzig, however, he exerted little influence upon the religious art for nearly a century after his death.

THE CHORALE

German music was based upon the chorale, which was the product of a very different race and faith than in any previous century. The undeveloped chorale form was vitally connected with the popular life and feeling, and its fund of material grew constantly.

No other country can show an artistic expression of equal value, or one that so perfectly fulfills the definition of a national treasure, as this musical form of the chorale, which we are justified in assigning to Bach. It attained a place in the hearts of the whole German race; love and reverence having an equal share, because of its rhythmic definiteness and melodic structure, derived from the canto fermo of the Latin church. Since the Reformation, the enthusiasm of the people had not had time to cool towards their hymns, and it is little wonder that the whole nation should have become musicians, having been brought up upon the simplest and most beautiful melodies that have ever been created. It is interesting today to notice how many points the characteristics of the chorales seem to have suggested, expedients which have resulted in the development of artistic forms of lasting value. The survival of the influence of the ancient ecclesiastical modes gave the German musicians a greater freedom in the manipulation of harmonic relations than was possessed by any other nation after the supplanting of the

modes by the modern scales. The Lutheran melodies were at once rhythmical and congregational, and it was necessary to wait at the end of each line of the hymn until the tardy singers in the audience had reached the same point as the choir. This expedient brought about the filling up of these pauses with instrumental interludes, which not only gave a new scope to the invention of the organists, but also suggested the form of those cantata choruses in which some of the greatest music of the world has found expression.

Another peculiarity common to almost all the chorale melodies is their fitness for imitative or fugal treatment, in which they rival the plain song of former years.

The origin of the German chorale is ascribed to three different sources; first to the hymns and chants of the Latin church, upon which it was natural for the new church to draw. The only direct changes were concerned with the form, which was modified to meet the requirements of the new and the more popular methods of singing. During the first century after the Reformation the rhythm of the chorale was much more lively, diversified and syncopated than later, when it was found more desirable to adopt the heavy dignified regular form that characterizes the German chorale to the present day.

Second - the German chorale originated in some of the German sacred songs of the earlier days, which were of a far more popular type than those of other countries. As early as the ninth century, such hymns and melodies

existed, so it should not be assumed that the people had never sung in the German tongue Before the Reformation and that Luther was the creator of German ecclesiastic song.

The third and most important of the sources of Protestant church music is the secular songs of the earlier days, from which legacy of the minnesingers and the music loving populace, the most stirring and beautiful melodies were derived. These forms were remodelled into appropriate forms for the new purpose.

The oldest hymn books of the Reformed Church, which are the "Wittenberg" and the "Walther" of 1524, contain two folk melodies and numberless examples illustrating this natural appropriation of German and even French popular songs by the new church.

These supplied the Lutherans with material more congenial and better suited to the use of the congregation in unison song, because of their more familiar form, rhythm and melody, than did the style of the Roman ecclesiastic music. Thus the music of the Protestant church became in the highest sense, the sacred popular song.

The use of popular melodies in scholastic forms for church music had long been in vogue. The difference was that the older masters used this folk melody merely as a thematic basis or cantus firmus, and so wreathed the other parts in contrapuntal forms about this, that the folk song was wholly unrecognizable. Wherefore, in the Reformed church, the secular melody was retained in its original simple form and adopted as the air or tune, first

in the tenor but soon transferred to the soprano, and was sung with plain harmonic accompaniment by the whole congregation

But besides this practice of borrowing material for its music, the Reformed church soon began to compose its own chorale melodies, which were still more accurately adjusted to the new spirit and methods.

The chorale treated in four part harmony involved the liberation of harmony, and the older rules were relaxed. It is hardly correct to speak of the chorales as belonging to the ecclesiastical modes, yet they conform in many respects to the conventions of the modes, and in none more uniformly than in the scheme of the final cadence, in which the key-note, or the final of the mode, is approached by one descending step.

Bach made an innovation, in disposing the chorales of his nation in four part harmony, which seemed revolutionary at the time; by allowing the part which held what is now called the leading tone, to break the rule of rising to the key-note, and to fall either to the dominant or the mediant of the key.

For many generations before the birth of Bach, his ancestors excelled in the art of music, and their books show plainly that the sacred music of the time in Germany consisted almost exclusively in arrangements or adaptations of choral themes in one form or another. Cantatas, motets and instrumental fugues were founded on the melodic forms taken from the hymn tunes, but nearer still to the original chorale stood the form of the chorale-prelude or the chorale

variation, two forms of the greatest importance in the work of Bach and his ancestors.

Bach's work stood squarely upon that of several preceding generations, the technical foundations being already provided, and it remained for him to fill the style with further vitality and to apply it to his own ideas.

Therefore today we think of Bach, as having inherited the art of the chorale as a birthright. Thru his experience in the choir of the church of St. Michael at Luneburg, and from his half brother, Bach understood more clearly the work of the great masters of northern Germany, at the time when he was ready to interweave in his own pieces, impressions from without. By indefatigable study he made himself master of the literature of German music, especially that for the organ and choir. Bach often visited Hamburg to hear Reinken, as was said before he cared little for the opera as he was more interested in the contrapuntal style as used by various schools of German organists, and his taste was set toward church and chamber music, the chorale and cantata.

Thruout his long life, the love of his country's special form of sacred music remained with him, and the instances in which betook the suggestion of his compositions from the chorales, are innumerable. His use of the chorales in the variously arranged forms in the church cantatas, and for the organ is one of the chief characteristics of his personality.

THE CANTATA

As a direct outcome of the German chorale, the church cantata, a form exclusively confined to Germany, deserves comment both on its own account, and because of its large employment by Bach thruout his life.

This form of music may be traced back to Italy, where the monodic style, first employed in the opera about 1600, was soon adopted into the music of the solon. The cantata was at first, a musical recitation by a single person, without action, but accompanied by a few plain chords struck upon a single instrument. This simple design was however expanded in the first half of the seventeenth century, into a work in several movements and in many parts. Religious texts were soon used, and the church cantata was born. The cantata was eagerly taken up by the musicians of the Protestant church and gradually, became a prominent feature in the regular order of worship. In the seventeenth century, the German cantata consisted usually of an instrumental introduction, a chorus singing a bible text, a spiritual aria, either for one or two solo voices, and a chorale. This form was used during the earlier part of the eighteenth century, then it also incorporated the recitative and the Italian aria form, and carried the chorus form to its full power.

A cantata is somewhat analogous to the anthem of the church of England, altho on a larger scale. It is neither epic nor dramatic, but renders a more or less general mood of praise or prayer.

The stricter forms of the cantata retain the actual melody and words of the chorale in the successive numbers, while in the freer forms of the cantata, the hymn tune appears as the ground work of the opening chorus, and is referred to vocally or instrumentally in some of the intermediate sections for solo voices. The opening chorus was often built on the scriptural text by which the hymn is suggested; three of the vocal parts confine themselves to these words, while the fourth brings in the successive lines of the hymn tune with its associated words. The musical theme of each line gave the suggestion of the instrumental interludes by which the lines are separated, just as the lines are separated in singing the hymn in the Lutheran churches, and the final verse of the hymn is sung as it would be in the church service.

If the cantata has only two great divisions, the simple chorale verse generally ends each division, while the sermon occupies the space between the two parts in the performance.

Thus we see that the cantata is almost as closely bound up with the service of the church, as the chorale itself. As a rule, the solo portions were in a contemplative style, set to verses written on some characteristic central

idea. Occasionally they were a paraphrase of the biblical text, but more often were supposed to be the utterance of the individual soul in acceptance of the scripture.

The German, as a rule, took the art of music in a serious spirit, a thing too lovable to be used for mere distraction and amusement. Their music was the outcome of genuine and deep feeling and not, as with other nations, of artistic sensibility or love of mere beauty or desire for display. We must see distinctly that the cantata is very unlike the type of oratorio to which we are accustomed in the present day. The oratorio is a quasi-dramatic form of art, and its occasional lapses into a meditative style are comparatively rare. The cantata never loses sight of the devotional or religious purpose and for this reason, it must always fulfill its highest object in connection with a church service, while the oratorio is primarily intended for the concert room.

Also in the oratorio, the incidents belonging to the story chosen must all be clearly presented in dramatic or narrative sequence; while in the cantata it very often happens that only a passing allusion is made even to very seemingly important circumstances.

Bach's career is divided into four main groups of the church cantatas, first the Arnstadt and Muhlhausen period 1703-1707; second the Weimar period 1708-1717; third the Cothen period 1717-1723; and fourth the Leipsiz period from 1723-1750.

The first part of the first period which was during

Bach's position as organist at Arnstadt has only one cantata assigned to it, as his creative activity at this time was applied mainly to the works for organ. In 1707 he obtained the post of organist at the Blasius-Kirche at Muhlhausen, and his works at this time show that the master was unconsciously making studies for those cantatas in which his greatest thoughts were to be expressed. They are two cantatas on sacred words but connected with secular events, one in celebration of the change of councillors, the other in honor of a wedding.

In 1708, the beginning of the second group, Bach was appointed court organist to the Duke of Weimar, and he was brought more closely than heretofore into connection with instrumental music, since his duties included playing the first violin in the ducal band. His attention was for a time diverted from the cantata form and his best known cantatas of the period was "Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit", which is different from his other forms in that the choral and solo portions are much more closely interwoven and the continuity of the work as a whole, far greater. It does not belong however to the stricter class of chorales cantatas, since three chorals instead of one are introduced in its course and none of them appears in any form in the first chorus. After the solo passages for the tenor and bass a wonderful chorus part follows, the three lower vocal parts carry on a fugue on the words "It is the old decree: man, thou art mortal", while the soprano part with an independent subject, sings "yea, come, Lord Jesus". Meanwhile the tune

of the chorale " I have cast my care upon God" is given out by the flutes and viola-da-gamba, the whole combination giving us a complete sermon on death and at the same time a piece of music of perfect beauty. Following an alto and bass duet, the work ends with another chorale for the choir, set much more elaborately than in the majority of the cantatas.

Two more cantatas composed at the beginning of his third period during the period of his residence at Cothen, or about 1720, are all that precede his activity in Leipzig.

With the appointment as Cantor of the Thomas schule in Leipzig in 1723, his opportunities in regard to church music were renewed and during this period, we find his maturest and sublimest choral works in number two hundred sixty six approximately.

Bach's realism and the quaint literalism of his treatment are so clearly shown in his "Wachet aufmruft uns die Stimme" that a study in detail of this work will show the personal traits in Bach's character as imbedded in his works. It is founded on the hymn beginning with the same words and deals with the subject of the wise and foolish virgins, connected with the mystical marriage between Christ and the church. The plan of the work is purely symmetrical, the three verses of the hymn being divided by two duets, each preceded by a recitative, and entirely independent of the chorale-tune. While the numbers in which the chorale occurs deals with those who are represented by the wedding guests, two duets can only be described as love music, differing only slightly from

what might appear in a dramatic work. The middle section of the work, in which the tenor voices sing a description of the wedding festivities while the festivities themselves are naively represented by a bourree, is of exquisite beauty. In this case, where all is on a plane of mysticism and the whole is to be regarded as approaching very nearly to an act of worship, we feel that the literalism is fully justified. His "Christmas Oratorio" also written during the period at Leipzig, and probably about 1734, is a collection of six church cantatas. None of the choruses are founded upon any hymn tune, as in the bulk of his cantatas, and in largeness of design, they approach the forms of the B minor Mass rather than any cantata. Again the famous cradle song here suggests that the person of the virgin is in a manner represented, but the words are less suitable to the character than to the typical Christian soul.

During this period, the work on his six motets should be mentioned. The form of these six motets differs from that of the cantata mainly, in being without accompaniment. The most beautiful is, "Jesu, meine Frende", which is a five part chorus with several trio numbers, and set to the words of Johannes Franck's hymn. Finer than any of these however, is the eight-part chorus, "nun ist das Heil", which with the orchestral accompaniment, the mighty swing of the theme, and its solemn fervor of triumphant expression, makes it one of Bach's most sublime creations, and worthy to stand on a level with the choruses of the B minor Mass.

THE PASSION MUSIC

The Lutheran Church borrowed not only the portions of the Mass, the habit of chanting old hymns and tunes, but also the custom of singing the story of Christ's passion in Holy Week, with other musical additions. This usage must however be distinguished from the method of the earlier centuries, which actually represented the events of Christ's last days in visible action upon the stage. The Passion play was an ecclesiastical drama, performed under the auspices of the church for the purpose of impressing the people in the most vivid way with the Old and New Testament stories, and the binding force of doctrines and moral principles. Yet the observance out of which the German Passion music of the eighteenth century grew, was an altogether different affair. It consisted of the mere recitation without histrionic accessories of the story of the trial and death of Christ, as narrated by one of the four evangelists, beginning in the synoptic Gospels with the plot of the priests and scribes, and in St. John's Gospel with the betrayal. This narration formed a part of the liturgic office proper to Palm Sunday, Holy Tuesday, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Several officers took part in the delivery, one cleric intoning the evangelist's narrative, another the words of Christ, and a third, those of Pilate, Peter and other single

personages. A small group of ministers chanted the parts of the Jewish priests, disciples and the mobs. The text was rendered in the simpler syllabic form of the Plain Song, the chorus parts first being in unison then, as the art of part writing developed, they were set in four part counterpoint.

In 1703, Germany was interested in the Passion Music, "Ein kleines Passions - Oratorium" written by Handel in Hamburg. It was arranged from the gospel according to St John, with no chorales, but with contemplative airs, set by Wilhelm Postel. The chorus is in five parts almost thruout, the soprano, alto, first and second tenors, and bass. The meditative numbers begin with a soprano solo, followed by the recitative of the Evangelist, then the part of Pilate is set for an alto solo, while those of the Evangelist and Christ are for the tenor and bass respectively. The soldiers casting lots for the vestment are represented in a fugato chorus for alto, two tenors and bass. The introduction of a more elaborate accompaniment at important points is a foreshadowing of the device used by Bach in the St. Mathew Passion, where Christ's words alone are accompanied by the orchestra.

A new stimulus was given to the composition of passion settings by Brockes poem, "Der fur die Sunde der Welt gemarterte und sterbende Jesus", which was reset 30 times between 1712, the date of its publication and 1727. Among the most prominent of the thirty settings was that of Handel, dating from 1716, and composed at

Hanover. It cannot be compared with the great compositions which Bach soon gave to the world, but it does reach a high level of expressiveness and the choruses are vigorous, in accordance with the nature of the words. The choruses are founded on chorales with simple interludes. The baritone sings a very vigorous air for Christ, "Lo! I will smite the shepherd". John and James are represented by the two altos, and the soprano solo with the choral accompaniment, foreshadows a form afterwards used by Bach in both the famous Passion-settings, and are made effective in a measure, by Handel; but the idea was never developed as it is in Bach, into a beautiful and individual part of the musical creation.

Bach wrote for five consecutive years, and during this time he finished five Passion-settings. After his death, three came into the hands of his son, W. F. Bach, and these Passions disappeared. As for the other two, they were carefully preserved by Carl Philipp Bach, and they are the two great works which we know of today as the "St. John" and the St. Mathew" respectively.

In the "St. John Passion, which was performed for the first time on Good Friday 1724, there is no attempt to distinguish between the words spoken by Christ and those of other characters, but in "St. Mathews Passion", first performed on Good Friday, 1729, the accompaniment of Christ's words was given to the orchestra, and that of the other personages was supported only by the bass; the harpsichord and organ players filling in the weaker harmonization at their own discretion. This alteration of tone-color gives the most

beautiful contrast that can be conceived, and the solemnity which it adds to the words of the Savior is one of the most impressive elements in the work. The formal announcement of the history of the Passion, which forms the opening words of almost all of the older settings of the Passion, has been expanded into elaborate introduction choruses, and that which opens the "St. Matthew Passion" is one of the greatest creations of the master. The motive had been used by Handel in his works and by Bach himself in the "St. John Passion". In both of the great Passion settings, the recitatives of the Evangelist and of Christ are marvellous in their emotional power, and never before or since has recitative been raised to so high a value of expressiveness.

The "St. Luke Passion", undoubtedly by Bach, shows great inferiority however, as a simple chorale, to all other known works of Bach. We are interested in noting in this work, the great preponderance of chorale-verses over reflective solos; there being thirty-two chorale-verses and only seven solos in the whole work. The single instrumental movement is the chorale played in simple four part harmony on wind instruments, before and after the singing of a verse of the same hymn.

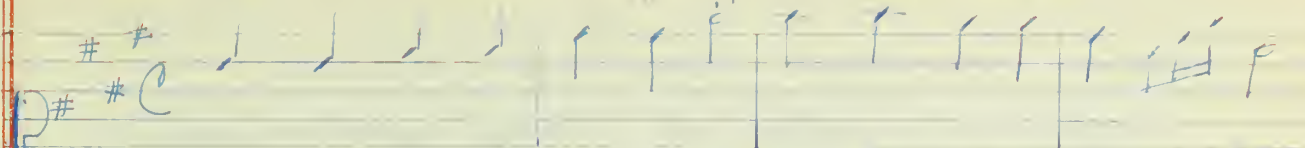
Perhaps we should note here the character of Bach's writing for the voice, as shown in a long series of works intended for the Lutheran church. Two widely different styles of treating the voice will be perceived through these. On the one hand, the form of the vocal phrases in the recitatives and the structure of the subjects in the choruses are mainly declamatory; they are always suggested by the

natural accent of the words as they would be spoken, and altho in the choruses the subject may be expanded into a flowing melody, it is in the first instance dictated by the words. Expression is the primary object of the composer in both these classes, and nowhere in Bach's works can be found a phrase that was inexpressive because it happened to suit the convenience of the singer.

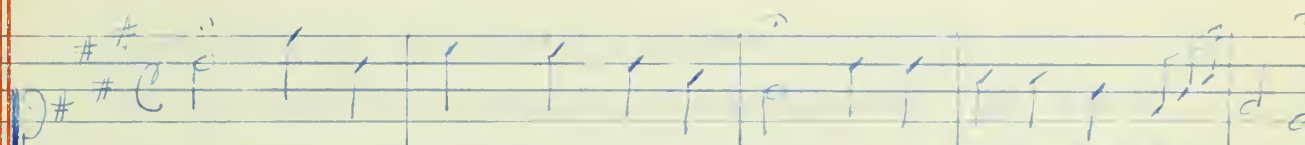
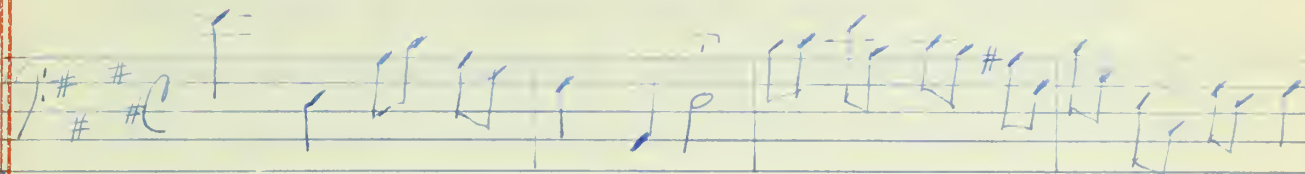
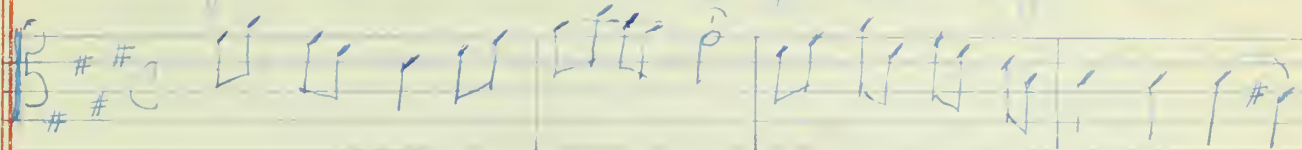
The other side of Bach's vocal writing is displayed in the chorale choruses and in the meditative airs. In the former, the vocal phrases are thot of as making a flowing contrapuntal accompaniment to the chorale tune which serves as the "canto fermo", and the ideal is not very different from that of the composers of the previous century, altho the manner of treatment has nothing to compare with these.

To Bach, as to all the greatest masters of the art, the chief interest of what is called "abstract" music was in the themes themselves regarded as sequences of ideal sounds, and unconnected with any special quality of tone. Even tho his vocal melodies are beautiful and melodious in the highest degree, they are not always "grateful" to the singers. In the same way his arrangement of the syllables in airs and choruses is thoroly characteristic, and to change it in any way is to sacrifice much of the vigor of Bach's ideas.

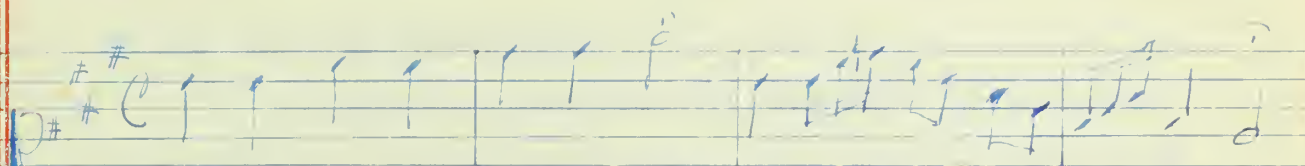
Choral. Part I of the Matthean Passion.



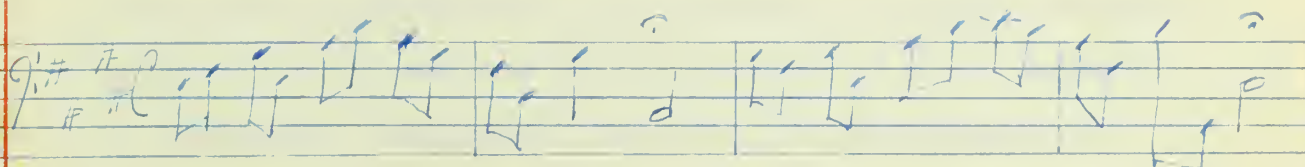
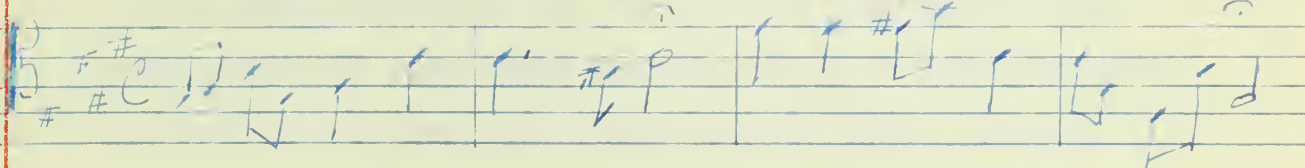
Je nun lass ich nicht von mir gehen einzig um zu sein



ten; christen rüset sich für und für. Zuhör, he hinhör, ihr seht



Se lig er mit mir an; gütlich: Meinen je nun lass ich nicht.



The history of the Passion setting after the time of Bach has changed greatly. The tendency of the weaker style came undoubtedly from the opera, which in all countries was under the same influence.

And so the spirit which pervaded the life and works of Bach is a German religious spirit. One which Germany has often seemed to disown, but which in times of need, has often reasserted itself with splendid confidence. When Bach had passed away, it seemed as if the mighty force which he had exerted had been dissipated, that he had not checked the decline of church music. The art of organ playing degenerated; the choirs became more and more unable to do justice to the great works that had been bequeathed to them; the public taste relaxed; the church wanted more florid and embellished kind of song as was already predominant in France and Italy; the people lost their perception of the real merit of their old chorals and permitted them to be altered to suit the requirements of the contemporary fashion.

No composer appeared who were able or who cared to perpetuate the old traditions. The Italian opera with its sensuous fascinations, was at the high tide of its popularity; was patronized by the ruling classes and gave the tone to all musical culture of the time. A still more obvious impediment to the revival of popular interest in church music was the rapid formation thruout Germany of the choral societies devoted to the performance of

oratorios. These choral unions had no connection with the church choirs of the eighteenth century, but instead they grew out of private musical associations. As in England, they took up the works of Handel, and Haydn's Creation in 1798 gave a still more powerful stimulus to the movement. Cantatas and Passions were no longer heard of in the church worship after the eighteenth century when Bach had made them so prominent.

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